



USING PARTICIPATORY VISUAL METHODS TO TEACH CHARACTER EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD, KENYA

Evans M. Olao¹,
Bernard L. Misigo²,
Karsten Speck³ⁱ

¹School of Education,
Department of Curriculum Instruction and Education Media,
Moi University,
Kenya

²School of Education,
Department of Educational Psychology,
Moi University,
Kenya

³Department of Education and Social Sciences,
Oldenburg University,
Germany

Abstract:

The rising cases of youth engagement in anti-social behaviour in Kenya present the need for educational stakeholders to invest in the teaching of character education. This paper has explored the use of participatory visual methods (PVM) in the teaching of character education. A multiple case-study design was used where eight grade three teachers were selected purposively. Data were generated through drawings, individual interviews and reflective journals. These were later analysed thematically through systematic open coding. The findings showed that PVM are learner centred and that they advance collaborative learning. This child-centeredness encouraged active learning and excitement among learners. It also boosted learners' memories and overcame the language barriers that learners experience during communication in class. This paper concluded that participatory visual methods are new approaches as an alternative for better teaching of character education in early childhood. This conclusion has implications for early childhood teacher education on child-appropriate teaching styles to be used in character education.

Keywords: character, character education, competency-based curriculum, early childhood education, participatory visual methods

ⁱ Correspondence: email lushya2000@gmail.com, karsten.speck@uni-oldenburg.de

1. Introduction

School is one of the most important institutions in the society responsible for character education. Among the ideals of character education is the inculcation of basic positive values such as respect, honesty, responsibility and fairness among learners (Osabwa, 2016). These ideals partly guide the education system of a country by being reflected in the aims, goals, content, instructional methods and policies of such a system. Battistich (2005) noted that teachers, as responsible adults, should use all the aspects of school life to foster optimal character development in learners.

Osabwa argued that the objectives of character education in Kenya remain elusive as attempts to use the current teaching approaches appear less effective. He points out that:

“After independence the main approach to character formation was instruction. This was administered through formal schooling, with moral values being taught through disciplines such as RE, SEE, LSE, and also through guidance and counselling, infusion and integration. There was little in terms of practical experiences [...] the said teachers mainly focused on attaining high grades in examinations as opposed to formation of good character among pupils. In the end, the objective of forming character remained elusive.” (Osabwa, 2016, p. 79)

Thus, various alternative solutions to this issue have been proposed by previous studies. These include: the need to teach character education in early childhood using the best teaching approaches and use of real life experiences (Battistich, 2005; Lee, 2013; Martinson, 2003). Further, Akanga (2014) advocated for the use of child-centred methods in teaching character education while Andiemba (2016) indicated that participatory visual methods are effective when used with young children.

Based on these studies, the current study envisioned participatory visual methods (PVM) as ‘new’ ways of teaching character education which might make a difference. The use of PVM in subjects like Science and HIV/ AIDS and Sexuality Education with older children in elementary and high schools has been documented sufficiently in the literature. However, there is limited empirical information on studies done on the use of participatory visual methods in teaching character education in Kenya formed the basis of this paper, which explored teachers’ experiences and views of using PVM to teacher character education.

1.1 The Concept of Character Education

According to Edgington (2002) character education (CE) is subjective and as such, it has not been able to acquire an all-encompassing definition. Berkowitz (2011) has described CE as an attempt within schools to craft pedagogical and supportive structures to foster the development of positive, ethical, pro social inclinations and competencies in learners. The teaching of values has been a critical part of the Kenyan school curricula since pre-

independence (Wamahiu, 2015). It was introduced in Kenya by missionaries linked to the Catholic and Anglican churches. These churches established schools with an aim of evangelizing and teaching of character that would enhance the religious beliefs of learners.

After independence the Kenyan government through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), developed reform documents that dealt with the institutionalization of character education in schools. This introduced the teaching of character education in formal schooling. Later it was recommended that character education be taught to students at all levels of education (Kamunge, 1988). However, the continued deviant behaviour that was observed among school going children led Akanga (2014) and other character education scholars to recommend the use of appropriate methods of teaching character education. The assertion by Muthamba (2017) that Religious Education lacked practicality, implied that character education required a more practical approach of teaching.

1.2 Teaching Approaches in Character Education

Most of the traditional approaches to character education emphasized the role of modelling, instruction, imitation, rewards and punishment, and authority in the formation of character (Nucci, Krettenauer, Nucci, & Narvaez, 2008). In contrast, the heuristic educators present the benefits of utilizing child-centred approaches to foster character development. In Kenya, most teachers today apply learner-centred approaches of teaching so as to promote learners' interest, critical thinking and enjoyment during learning inside and outside of the classroom (Hesson & Shad, 2007). With particular regard to early childhood education, Andiema (2016) advocated for participatory teaching and learning methods that make children enjoy learning and apply what is learned to everyday life. De Lange and Stuart (2008) posit that most practicing teachers are currently not exposed to participatory strategies hence, they tend to teach the way they themselves were taught using didactic approaches.

1.3 Participatory Visual Methods

Participatory visual methods (PVM) are innovative teaching approaches that have been used successfully in addressing issues like HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence and sexuality education (Mitchell, 2008). They have also been widely used as research methodologies to enable the participants reflect on their knowledge of life and their daily experiences with the issue under investigation (De Lange, Khau & Athiemoolam, 2014). However, their research did not mention the applicability of such methods in the teaching of moral values.

Participatory visual products can be handmade, digital media or performance-based in their design. The handmade products include drawings, story-boarding, collage, beading, quilting, memory boxes, body mapping, murals, installations and graffiti. The digital products are photovoice, digital story-telling, participatory videos, digital archiving, blogging and social media. The performance-based products are dance,

theatre-in-education, forum and image theatre, and role plays. It must be noted at this point that these visual products can be used as teaching methods in the teaching-learning environment. Interestingly, they are being given more attention in Kenya which is experiencing curriculum reforms by way of adopting a Competency Based Curriculum (CBC). With the inception of CBC, it has become clear that children enjoy teaching approaches that are more practical and more visual such as in the use of photographs and videos (Griessel-Roux, Ebersohn, Smit, & Eloff, 2005). Furthermore, visual material in teaching encourages maximum participation by learners and also provides avenues for free expression of understanding and experiences with little dependence on verbal communication (Bev Van der Riet & Hough, 2005; Holderness, 2012; Wood & Wilmot, 2012).

Bearing the benefits of participatory visual methods in mind, it should be clear that most teachers are not really exposed to these methods. The teachers in Kenya are not an exception on this issue. Yego (2017) posits that participatory visual methods are effective for use by teachers and learners in the class to navigate issues around sexuality and HIV/AIDS education in Kenya. In her study Lily summarized the pedagogical qualities of participatory visual methods as: (1) they are child-centred (2) they free learners to engage in learning (3) they simplify teacher's role in the classroom (4) provide a free space for the teacher to deliver effectively.

Largely, Khau, De Lange and Athiemoolam (2013) concluded that participatory visual methods are able to transform classrooms into enabling and democratic spaces which are conducive for teaching and learning for all. Hence, it is imperative that teachers in all levels of education get exposed to the implementation of such methods in class. Berkowitz (2011) strongly advocated for the teaching of character education in early childhood while Andiema (2016) recommended the use of participatory methods to teach in early childhood. Given these postulations, this study explored the use of participatory visual methods in the teaching of character education in early childhood, elaborately focused on teacher experiences of using participatory visual methods upon implementation in class. An initial establishment of the methods used by teachers to teach CE in early childhood was also done.

2. Methodology

This study was located in the interpretivist paradigm that allowed for reliance on participants' views of their experience using PVM. A qualitative approach was employed and a multiple-case study design utilized so as to enable the analysis of data within and across cases. This was helpful in establishing the value and reliability of findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

2.1 Sample and Setting

This study used a non-probability sampling technique to obtain a purposive sample of 8 Grade 3 teachers from 4 public primary schools that had two streams per level in Eldoret

East Sub-County. The teachers selected were those that had been teaching the same set of learners from Grade 1 to Grade 3. It was believed that these set of teachers had used a number of approaches to teach character education and would be better placed to report on the effectiveness of implementing participatory visual methods in class.

2.2 Data Generation

Prior to the research, a three-day preparatory workshop was organised. The eight Grade 3 teachers who were selected to participate in the study were then invited. The main purpose of the workshop was to introduce and provide practical experience in the use of participatory visual methods. The training covered drawings, cellphilms, digital storytelling and photovoice. However, hands-on experience was only provided in the use of drawings and photovoice. Furthermore, the workshop aimed at making the teacher participants feel prepared and supported. The participants had a chance to meet and familiarize with each other. They were also given the opportunity to talk about their expectations regarding the implementation of the 'new' participatory teaching methods. The sessions were recorded and transcribed.

More practically, this study engaged the participants in making drawings, writing reflective journals and responding to questions during organised in-depth interviews. These were the three primary tools for data generation. The participants were guided to make drawings about their experiences of implementing participatory visual methods in class. They were also required to caption in writing the story in the drawings. This was informed by Gillies et al. (2005) who assert that short written descriptions should accompany drawings so as to explain the essence of the depiction. They were also provided by improvised writing material which they used as reflective journals. In these journals, the teachers were guided to make cumulative notes representing their reflections of implementing participatory visual methods over a period of time. The teachers took part in individual interviews that were semi-structured in design. They were interviewed to provide first-hand information on main issues around character education and its teaching.

2.3 Data Analysis

The three data generating tools gave lots of purely qualitative data. These data were analysed thematically in three levels of coding: (1) open coding (2) axial coding and (3) selective coding. The researcher began by listening to the audio transcripts obtained from the interviews and oral presentations of the drawings. This was followed by reading through the interview transcripts and the reflective journals. The data were then subjected to verbatim transcriptions which the researcher got immersed in. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), immersion is a situation whereby the researcher reads and re-reads through the transcribed data. In the open stage, data from the reflective journals, audio recorded interviews and oral presentation of drawings was transcribed manually through typing. Spaces were then left to the right side of the transcript page margins for

creation of memos. This enabled sorting of data for each school, and this was based on the uniqueness of the information.

During axial coding the researcher read through the memos while checking at the commonalities between the data. A Microsoft Word programme called '*DocTools*' was used to generate tables containing the data in text with their respective codes. This enabled the researcher to see the kind of information that was closely linked to each other and formed the basis of creating themes. After establishing the relationship between categories, the codes with the same labels were put together into one group. In the last stage, selective coding, the researcher crosschecked for any missing information. At this point, the codes were also keenly reviewed and those that were overlapping and redundant were reduced.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, the schools in the study area were visited to discuss the purpose of the study with the headteachers. After the initial permission was granted, the researcher discussed the same with the teachers who later gave consent to participate in the study. The teachers volunteered to take part in the study and were assured that their responses would only be used for the purposes of the research. All the teachers who participated in semi-structured interviews signed written consent forms, as did the parents of the grade 3 learners from the four schools. The participants' anonymity was kept throughout the study through assigned pseudonyms. Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Education of Moi University, the Office of the County Commissioner and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).

3. Results and Discussion

The qualitative data generated in this study were discussed in line with the literature and the constructivism learning theory. The researcher worked closely with the Grade 3 teachers in the incorporation of participatory visual methods in class. They particularly used drawings and photovoice to teach character education. However, there was the constraint of time considering the fact that character education was not indicated in the class timetable as a standalone subject. Hence, the teacher participants made time during CRE and Life Skills lessons. They would teach the character values as indicated in the objectives of the individual lessons using drawings and photovoice.

Each teacher would create time to ensure that the drawings and photovoice are used as much as possible and at the end of the lesson, they were expected to reflect on their experiences as much as possible. Based on their reflections, the teacher participants argued that participatory visual methods were learner-centred and enhanced collaborative learning. These arguments were used as themes to present the findings as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of findings

Research Question	Themes	Categories (Sub-themes)
What are the teachers' experiences and views of using PVM to teach character education?	Learner-centred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active learning • Learning atmosphere • Excitement and motivation • Memory boost • Practical approach • Language barrier
	Collaborative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group work

3.1 Learner-Centred Learning

As put by Gravoso et al. (2008), child-centred learning involves putting the pupil at the centre of the learning process. Participants argued that the use of drawings and photovoice carried many features of child-centred learning approaches.

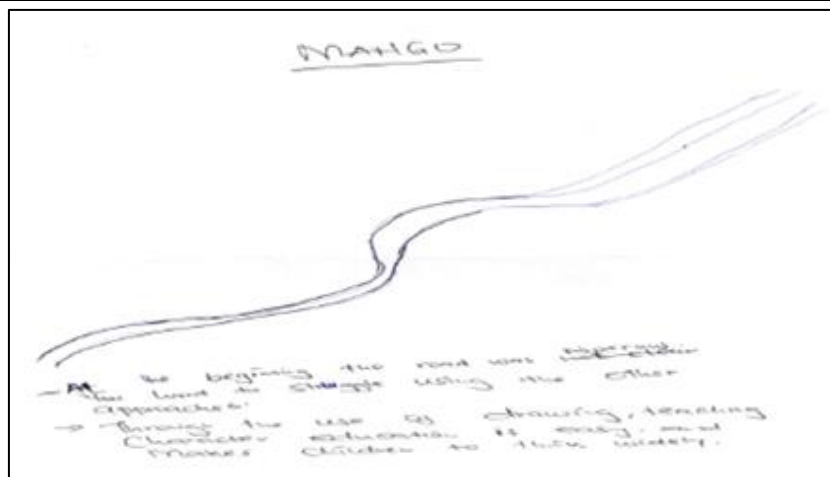
“Use of drawings and photovoice is child-centred. It is more on the child. I didn’t do the drawings. They drew themselves and it worked” (Oakley)

“Before attending the training on participatory visual methods of teaching, I used lecture method lessons which were teacher –centred.” (Pina)

The teachers argued that through these methods, the learners were actively involved in class activities and that their degree of participation subsequently increased. Through their active participation in class, the children’s thinking about character concepts widened. Teachers said that the children could be seen getting critical by asking each other questions and thinking deeply about how present their work. This agrees with the constructivism learning theory that support own creation of knowledge through critically asking questions and exploring existing knowledge.

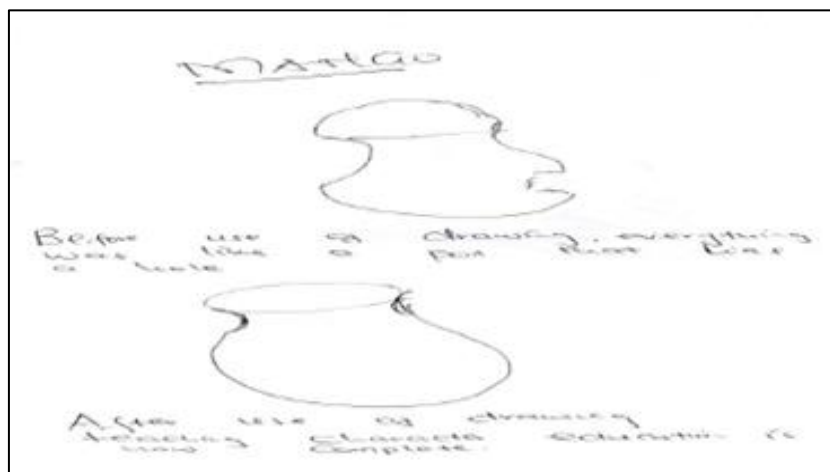
“Something like drawing, they are participating themselves, like the one we did, the photovoice, they are participating themselves. So that by the time you tell them we are going to something like respect, they come with different ideas themselves and not you giving them the ideas.” (Becky)

This is a drawing that was made by Melissa. She indicates that with the use of drawings, the road widens ahead. This is because the children can now think widely. Melissa notes that before the use of drawings, the learners could not think or do so normally but now their thinking has widened. This observation is consistent with Mpho (2018) and Weimer (2002) who posit that active engagement in class activities by learners deepens learning and widens and expands the thinking of learners to take on a more irregular path rather than adhering to a linear pattern.



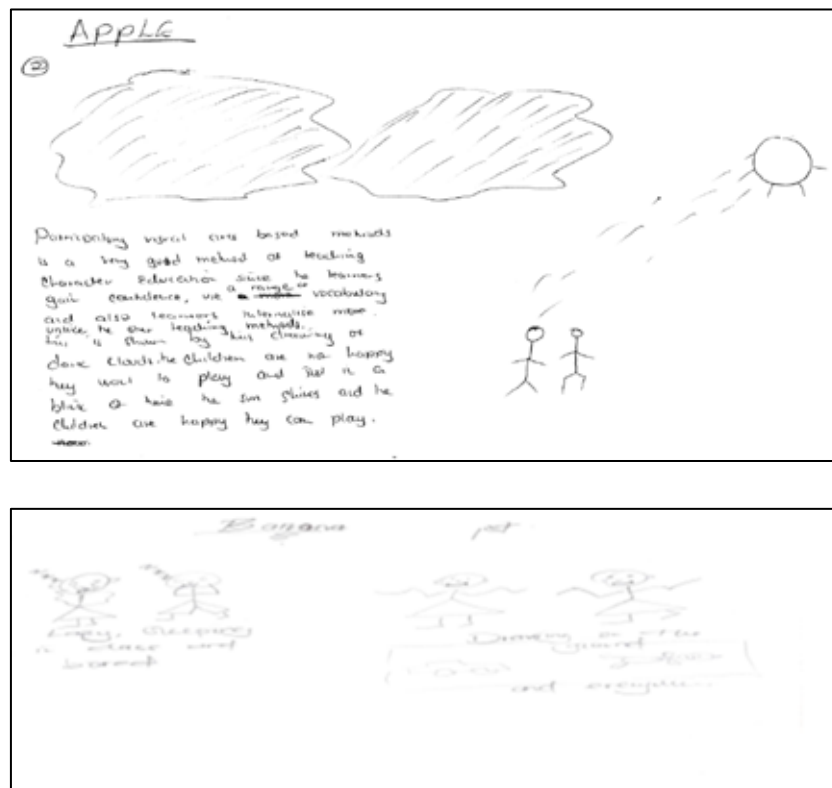
Knowledge retention also came up as an observed characteristic. It was found out that active engagement and class participation enabled learners to exploit concepts first hand hence leading to more knowledge retention. Karten (2010) posits that the use of child-centred teaching methods enables learners to accomplish tasks on their own with little guidance from the teacher. As a result, they are able to exploit their academic capabilities and increase the power of their knowledge retention.

"Before, knowledge was not retained. Very few children could retain knowledge. But now that we've taken photos, they are on the walls, we've displayed them, they cannot forget. So, it makes knowledge to be retained for a long time." (Melissa)



This drawing was done by Melissa who pointed out that before the use of drawings everything (knowledge) was like a pot with a hole at the bottom. She argued that in this example knowledge was leaking out. But after the use of drawings, knowledge about values in character education is not leaking out. She asserted that her learners could now retain knowledge. She also pointed out that with the use of drawings; she felt that the teaching of character education was made complete. This observation is

consistent with Baker and Wang (2006) who assert that the use of participatory visual methods in teaching leads to long term retention of knowledge.



In the above drawings, the participants argued that the use of drawings and photovoice made learning more enjoyable. They indicated that the exciting nature of these methods made all learners want to participate, including the learners who were initially known to be lazy. In agreement with Andiema (2016), this research found that the use of drawings and photovoice motivated learners to partake of the class learning activities. It was found out that these methods were also exciting to the teachers. Back in the preparatory workshop, the teachers said that they had not been exposed to participatory visual methods initially. Because this came as a 'new' method to them, they said that they were eagerly waiting to see how it would work with their learners.

"The two methods are quite motivating. They are motivating first to the teacher and then to the learners. They are very interesting." (Pauline)

"My learners were happy and not shy anymore. As a teacher, I also gained more out of their drawings. I put my thumbs up for drawing." (Becky)

This finding agrees with Rana, Malik and Naeem (2007) who observe that in the learning process, excitement begets motivation which enhances participation in class activities. However, it was the position of this study that teachers need to be careful to

ensure that overexcitement on the part of the learners does not override the lesson objectives.

The use of drawings and photovoice as claimed by the participants was able to transcend the language barrier. This in turn enhanced classroom interaction between the teachers and their learners. This study found out that through these methods, learners did not have to struggle with vocabulary or language of communication as the drawings spoke for themselves. Also, when working in groups, the learners were able to step in for each other hence covering for those that seemingly had poor language mastery for communication.

"If I find is somebody is stranded to explain him/herself, I just take a pencil or a piece of chalk. Go and draw whatever you want to talk about. And it will work." (Becky)

"And it really helped my slower because even they never used to talk. They never used to smile, but when it came to drawings, it was like... they were so excited." (Lucy)

"There is richness of content and you can see the mind of that particular pupil. It is a better way of allowing people to say what they have in thoughts without having to struggle with limited vocabulary. I will recommend these methods for the learners in the lower and mid classes because they have not yet acquired much vocabulary and this can limit them in the way they can write about a particular topic given to them." (Oakley)

Closely linked to the issue of transcending barrier, the teachers felt that the use of participatory visual methods created a conducive learning environment where learners were free to express their thoughts and ideas with ease.

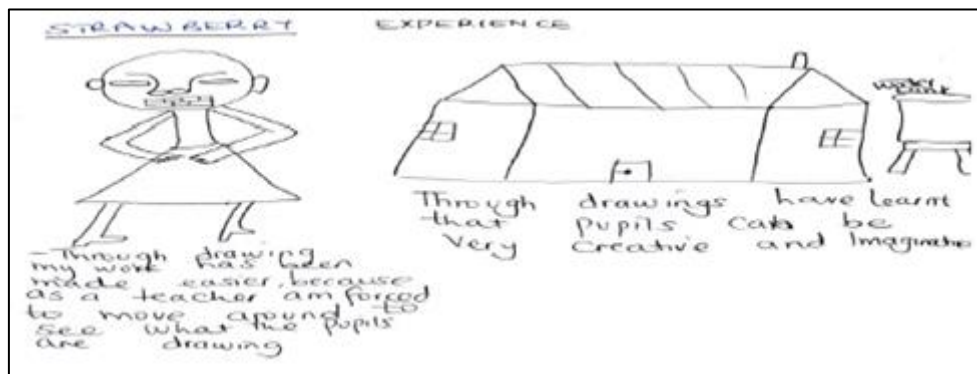
"You find that child who was not able to talk, was silent all the time now can talk, can even ask questions, is free to mingle with the rest." (Agnes)

"I also came to realize that pupils like to work in a free atmosphere where no much supervision is done." (Pauline)

In this case, the learners were able to interact freely with each other and with their teachers through the use of drawings and photovoice thus improving the student-teacher relationship. The teachers maintained that the use of participatory visual methods to teach character education was timely as it enabled them to realize that all learners are unique and need friendly learning environments to be able to work well and learn better as individuals and as members of a group.

From a constructivist learning perspective, teachers are encouraged to provide reflective activities that engage both the minds and hands of the learners (Dewey, 1929). These activities should as well provide something to think about and something to touch.

It was revealed that through drawings and photovoice, learners got a practical experience of learning about character values within the process of character education.



This was a drawing by Stacy where she pointed out that through participatory visual methods her work in class was made easier. She was left to move around the class and see how the pupils were immersed in the action of making drawings. Stacy argued that the use of participatory visual methods is practical and not theories. The practical nature of using drawings and photovoice encouraged the learning of character values in a manner that was more concrete. These finding is consistent with (Griessel-Roux et al., 2005) who posit that children desire teaching approaches to be more practical and visual to enhance learning processes.

3.2 Collaborative Learning

The teachers felt that using drawings and photovoice in class helped the learners to work together hence learning from each other. It was clear in this research that all teacher and learners were new to the use of participatory visual methods in teaching character education. For this reason, there was need to work as a team for guidance and direction.

"The children were able to discuss and tell situations depicting hard work. Some went as far as telling their experiences of hard work in school and at home. The children grouped themselves and started taking photos depicting hard work." (Agnes)

"After the lesson I came to realize that my learners have developed some values like sharing, love and others. They have developed in their language in that they can communicate and collaborate by sharing ideas, working together. I really was happy because each group had different ideas and the photos that came out and they also learnt from other." (Pauline)

When learners engage in group learning as seen in the highlighted responses as a form of a participatory strategy to learning, they are able to construct knowledge through reflection and dialogue. Through group working, the learners were able to engage in critical discussion of concepts and ideas pertaining to character values (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012).

Up to the time that this research was completed it was found out that teachers experienced some constraints that have the potential of impeding the implementation of participatory visual methods in class. Their main concerns were around teachers' preparedness and competency towards incorporating these methods in class. They also argued that these methods took more time in class during teaching and therefore were not favoured by the strict class timetables that they had. They felt that if the challenges they faced were appropriately addressed, then these methods would be successful in the teaching of character education and other subjects.

4. Conclusion

This article has presented how the researcher implemented the use of drawings and photovoice as participatory visual methods in the teaching of character education. This came as a response to the rising cases of youth involvement in anti-social behaviour in Kenya. The researcher has also discussed how the teacher participants were prepared on the use of participatory visual methods to teach character education. The teachers' experiences and the meanings they made out of their experiences have also been highlighted. The researcher therefore affirms that teaching character education using participatory visual methods enabled the researcher and the teacher participants to understand the importance of relying on effective teaching methods to teach character education and other subjects as well. The researcher also experienced the thrill that accompanied the revelation that learners can also contribute to their own learning. So, for the benefit of character education as a preventive tool against youth involvement in anti-social behaviour, this research posits that participatory visual methods are new approaches as an alternative for better teaching of character education in early childhood settings.

4.1 Recommendations

In furtherance to the above, the policy makers and curriculum developers ought to design an independent curriculum for character education and have it taught as a subject on its own. This would give teachers more time to engage in teaching character education. The use of participatory visual methods should be introduced and taught in teacher training colleges. Professional development programmes about these methods should also be organised for in-service teachers. These would assist to enhance teacher-competency. In line with its mandate to distribute material resources to schools, the government through the ministry of education should venture into availing and supplying materials required for the implementation of participatory visual methods. With the development of the Competency-Based Curriculum as a curriculum reform in Kenya, there is need to implement participatory visual methods in schools as innovative teaching methods.

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Authors' contributions

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Data availability statement

The authors have qualitative data that are new and were analyzed. Consequently, they are happy to share the data if asked.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this paper.

About the Authors

Evans Mos Olao is currently a PhD student in Moi University in Kenya, whose programme is focused on Curriculum Studies. He is also a holder of a Master of Education in Research degree. He is an alumnus of the East and South African German Centre of Excellence for Educational Research Methodologies and Management (CERM-ESA) and a member of the African Excellence Network (AEN). His academic interests are in research methods, teacher education, early childhood pedagogy, curriculum design, academic writing and organizational administration. He predominantly specialises in qualitative research.

Professor Bernard Lushya Misigo is an associate professor of educational psychology in the School of Education and an assistant dean in the school of postgraduate studies at Moi University in Kenya. He also teaches courses on mixed methods research and qualitative inquiry.

Prof. Dr. Karsten Speck is a professor of research methods in the department of education at the Carl of Ossiety University of Oldenburg in Germany. His current research focuses include: multi-professional cooperation, school absenteeism, cooperation between youth welfare and school / school social work, participation and volunteer work, university research and inquiry learning and teaching.

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